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GAY YOUSE: AN EYE FOR THE BEST
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MEMO:
LIVES IN THE ARTS

TEXT:
"The important thing is to teach people to see," says Gay Youse. She pauses, then adds, "And to see the best."

Youse is the artistic director of the Helen Bumpus Gallery in the Duxbury Free Library. She has directed the gallery ever since its establishment 20 years ago, but while she is also a painter, she has never shown there till now. Through May 30, however, her paintings are displayed at the Bumpus Gallery as a testament to a remarkable career.

"We're a nonprofit gallery. That means we can show anyone," she continues. "Many artists find it a relief to exhibit in Duxbury; it's less intimidating than Newbury Street." Although the Helen Bumpus Gallery is, in one sense, an entry-level gallery, it has nevertheless maintained rigorous professional standards over the years. Among the artists who have exhibited there are Jack Wolfe, Harold Tovish, Marianna Pineda, Carl Nelson, David Aronson, Lois Tarlow, Lloyd Lillie, Jack Kramer and Magnus Johnston. There was even a posthumous Karl Zerbe show, loaned to Duxbury by the art dealer Boris Mirski. Clearly the gallery plays a significant role in the community -- its programs mingle with those of the nearby high school -- yet meets a broader aesthetic purpose, too.

"I studied at the Boston Museum School during the early '50s," Youse recalls. "Painting with Davis Aronson and Zerbe, drawing with Ture Bengtz. The greatest influences on me were Albert Pinkham Ryder, Kokoshka -- what a wonderful self-portrait in the Museum of Modern Art, where he's pointing at his war wound! -- and de Stael. Later I came under the spell of Morris Louis. You know the great Louis at the Fogg? When you see those stripes down the corridor, you're looking at pure poetry. Kokoshka, incidentally, came to the school and gave a talk while I was there, but he didn't conduct classes.

"While I was going to school I began teaching at Norfolk House Center in Roxbury. I taught classes with adults, teen-agers and children and discovered there's no greater joy than to have a 9- or 10-year-old begin to see what you've told them. I never talked down to them, but I urged them to paint what they felt. On the other hand, I insisted they use first-rate materials, good brushes, paper, things like that.

"After my Museum School experience I taught at the Duxbury Art Association for several years. In the late '60s it was decided that we ought to rebuild the old part of the town library. Marjorie Conant Bush-Brown -- her brother had been president of Harvard -- and several other patrons urged the town to incorporate a gallery. The space, in the front part of the library, is splendid. We can accommodate 50 pieces if necessary.

"I was asked to serve as director, and right from the start I resolved

to follow one principle, and one principle only: to try and show the very best. The gallery was funded by the town until Proposition 2 1/2; now it's supported by artists and townspeople."

The Bumpus Gallery doesn't collect, yet in other respects the exhibition program resembles that of large institutions. "I work a year in advance and with the advice of a committee," Youse says. "Right now we're scheduling 1991. Usually we do nine shows a year. Since 1968 we've mounted more than 20 loan exhibitions like 'Art from the Smith College Museum.' The Pucker-Safrai Gallery on Newbury Street has been particularly generous about loaning artworks. For the most part, though, we do one-person and group shows, and we collaborate closely with students at the high school. In June, for instance, we're going to have a fabulous exhibition showing the relationship of sculpture and drawings, with pieces by Lloyd Lillie, Penelope Jencks, Marianna Pineda and John Wilson."

Currently, Presently, Youse anxiously awaits the outcome of a grant proposal that will permit an innovative experiment -- having a sculptor-in-residence at Duxbury High School. The opening of her first Bumpus Gallery exhibition on April 9 turned out to have the character of a surprise party: Artists throughout the region flocked to the library, and it was announced they had funded a Gay Youse scholarship to be awarded annually to a Duxbury art student. They presented her with a plaque, "from artists and friends who admire you very much." She admits that arranging and hanging exhibitions doesn't leave her much time for her own painting; still, this summer as usual, she will paint from nature along the Maine coast. "If I didn't keep painting," she declares, "I would stop growing."

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CAPTION:
PHOTO

Globe staff photo/David L. Ryan / Gay Youse: Her show is a testimony to a remarkable career.

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